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THE SHORT STORY

Edited by MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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BOOKS

By MANJERI S. ISVARAN

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Venkataramani: Writer and Thinker As. 8

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(This section is devoted to Editorial Comments on current topics of interest)

The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible place
Shed influence. They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it.—

COLERIDGE

It is in the highest degree unphilosophic to call language or diction the dress of our thoughts . . . It is the incarnation of our thoughts.—

WORDSWORTH

Francis Marion Crawford

IN the October issue of *The Short Story*, while talking of Mr Marion Crawford's novel, *Mr Isaacs*, for its Indian setting we touched upon a few details of his life relevant to a clearer understanding of the novel. Now comes a biographical study of the novelist, famous for his stupendous output in fiction—he wrote five thousand words a day—entitled "My Cousin : F. Marion Crawford" (Macmillan, 10s. 6d.) by Mrs Maud Howe Elliott and the publishers say that this is 'the first book ever published about Marion Crawford and that its author has had access to personal and family letters and has drawn both on her own memories of Crawford and on those of other intimate friends.' Mrs Elliott has made it apparent at the outset that it is not her intention to aim at a critical study of Crawford's work ; she is concerned with the movie-like story of his life and his circle. She calls him Marion the Magnificent ; and though he was simple in his personal tastes 'his extravagance was on the grand scale. He liked to be spoken of as the Prince of Sorrento . . . Grandeur was what he wanted in all his own and his family's life. In the villa a butler, a footman, a train of lesser domestics ; on the yacht Luigi and his fellow-sailors, all must be well dressed, well housed, well fed.' About Crawford, but not overshadowed by him, are the luminous figures of his father, Thomas Crawford, the sculptor, and of other American artists of that period in Italy. To us, Crawford's life in India affords special interest ; it shows a spirit, not aiming at reckless adventure but craving for life, more life. 'When he was reduced,' his cousin writes, 'to his last ten-rupee note, he resolved that as soon as that was spent he would enlist in the Sixth Regiment of the Dragoons, then stationed at Bombay. He wrote a letter to the Colonel stating that he was an American and wished to join the regiment. He laid the letter and the money together and vowed that

when the rupees were spent the letter should go.' But instead of the regiment, an English newspaper in Allahabad claimed him; he was editor of it for two years and was twenty-six and full of raw materials to write a novel when he left India.

'There is something of himself in each of his heroes,' says Mrs Elliott, and to know the story of his life one must read his novels. She understands him in his strength as well as in his weakness; her fine bright pen sheds soft dewdrops of sympathy and the result is a very interesting biography.

Dr Johnson and His Circle

A CENTURY and a half ago Samuel Johnson died but that he had ardent devotees still in England was shown by the many who came to St. Paul's to attend the service in commemoration of him. Dr Matthews, the new Dean of St. Pauls, described Johnson's religion as 'essentially that of the dutiful man' and found 'My friend, clear your mind of cant, as the most useful of all Johnson's injunctions. Those who obey this command help the world, in the words of another distinguished English man of letters, 'in a great new movement towards generosity.'

True Enlightenment

'LITERATURE is not trying merely to amuse, it is not trying to instruct, it is opposed to all generalisations; literary works of art are something from which the reader may extract what he needs. If literature aims at anything it aims at enlightenment.' So spoke Mr W. H. Auden in an address to the Literary Society of the University of Manchester recently. No new discovery by Mr Auden who is still young and is untiringly marcopoloing; a literary work that is written for the satisfaction of a particular class, literary filigree work to foam in perfumed boudoirs, is not woven of the light that the heart in its most passionate or halcyon moments beams; it clouds the mind of the satisfied reader and decays it. Literature, to enlighten, must wonder at itself and Mr Auden, the fine creative artist that he is, we are sure, should have wondered at himself for the many splendid things he has written.

A Russian Author in London

MIKHAIL SHOLOKOV, author of the very popular novel, "And Quiet Flows the Don" and who has been described as the 'first proletarian novelist' has recently paid a visit to London as a guest of the Russian ambassador. Sholokov is still twenty-nine and has to his credit at such a young age, five novels of quality. Sholokov told those who met him very interestingly about authors and readers in Russia; Russia is a land of mass production in novels; books could be had for a few coppers; the writers there were held in great affection and esteem.

Fiction Leads

THE total of books published in 1934 in Great Britain and Ireland is 15,628—the record year for books—600 more than in 1933. Of these 4,531 were books of fiction, which was 442 more than in 1933. Art, architecture, and *belles lettres* show a decline; there have been fewer cheap editions and reprints of works already published.

Shakespeare in Hollywood

PROF MAX REINHARDT is to make a talking film of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" with which Mr Warner, head of the Warner Brothers, says that they are to make screen history. Shade of Shakespeare and shadows of his creations!

OVERWROUGHT

By E

DOWN the winding staircase which reached to an only room on the upper floor sounds like the notes of a woodpecker came, stopped for a while, then came again with sharper taps disturbing the siesta of the woman in the hall below. She sat up; raised her left hand, the fingers twinkling, to cover the yawning mouth; whilst with the right tidied her dress, face, and steelgray hair. She might be of any age between fortyfive and fifty; was handsome and had the figure of a girl which consciousness shone in her eyes, smiling, gratified, proud. She looked to where the noise came from, and presently the line of her vision was cut off by a young woman passing rapidly and climbing the stairs.

The old woman gave a snort of scorn and walked towards the pump what time the younger one had reached the topmost step and opened the door by an elbow-thrust for in her hands were a *lota* and a plate, the former having a bronzed hot colour round its belly. The man who was bending over the typewriter in the act of putting a new ribbon, went on bending and revolving the disk though he had heard the door opening with a distinct creak. The girl—she was only nineteen—put down the things and lightly touched his arm. He looked at her aslant and frowned, the hair of about a week's growth on his face sticking out like quills upon the fretful porpentine. Poor fellow! he hadn't time even for a shave—he was thirty, comely, and limber; plaints, affidavits, and letters to the various clients scribbled in shorthand lay on the table heavy with opaque laziness to be typed; his master was a Barrister-at-law who, in the inner temple of his body, carried the heart of a devil and made devils of the half-dozen juniors under him.

She retained her touch on his arm and he frowned. She increased the pressure, smiling wistfully round him, and he shook himself free.

'The coffee is running cold,' she said.

'Throw it into the gutter,' he snapped. 'Don't you see I am busy?'

'I do. But I thought it was time for lunch and because you did not come down, came myself up.'

'Mother should have called me.'

That was a stab and she said with a little heat: 'It's mother, mother, mother, always. Then what am I here for? What is a wife for?'

He was nettled but his masculine arrogance failed to find a reasonable answer. He fidgeted.

She came nearer and holding the back of the chair, continued, her voice taking a plangent resonance: 'Why are you always thus angry with me? I have never gone against your wishes, never annoyed you by any word or deed. You were so loving once,' and here she placed her hands on his shoulders, 'and whenever I went to my father's for a short stay I heard nothing but praise of you from everybody there, and I was proud in my happiness. But you changed all of a sudden, grew away from me, and your first unfeeling word . . .

'Stop. Enough of this sickly drivel,' he cried, springing from the chair and pushing her rudely aside.

She tripped over the *lota* of coffee and struck her back against the wall. A sharp gasp of pain and collecting herself she knotted her loosened hair. And while yet her arms were raised to make the knot, his eyes fell on her bosom heaving defiantly, the tight bodice of thin printed silk striking the defiant note louder, intenser, and a light of sensual pudency swept glittering into them. She saw his look and relented;

desire was equally strong in her; but the triumphant moment had died like a thunderclap. He looked icily and froze the desiring women into the neglected wife; and wiping the tips of his fingers pinkstained by the ribbon on the edge of the table tilted his chin to the door and said: 'Go!'

'Go I shall, and leave you to *her*,' she cried, breathing hard and cracking her knucklebones. 'Your mother connives in it—God help the poor sickly husband—make the best of it while *she* is here. You should never have married me, the *darling* son!' The adjective rolled over a drawl, saw-edged.

'You breath will blast an infant,' he replied with the composure of a valcano. 'Go away before I do something violent.'

A look of despair, dry, empty despair, came over her face which he thought was scorn and before her curling lips could frame the retort he pushed her out, shut the door, and walking towards the table began, in his agitation, mulling the sheets of paper and drawing the hood over the typewriter.

He was about to sit down and compose himself when he heard his name being called; a call so warm and musical with love, he felt; and opening the door hastily descended the stairs.

The mother who stood clanking the pump knew intuitively what had happened up in the room and she greeted her son with a smile.

'Not a drop of water, Saranga,' said she, 'the city seems to have gone dry. The tap is as unyielding as the cow that has drawn its milk from the udder to the horns.'

'Step aside, mother. You could have asked Nachi to draw water from the well down below.' With which he shook the pump handle vigorously only to hear a suck, a hiss, and then a slow whistling.

'Every afternoon wrestling with that confounded thing, now broke in a new voice and a woman of about twenty-five stepped into their midst. Tall and tenuous as a reed, ample of breasts, clipsome of waist, attractively dressed, with nose-screws and *kammals* of diamond, neckchain of gold, and half a dozen gold bangles of various patterns on each of her wrists, Komalam was a lady in the grand manner; Ravi Varma would have liked to paint her. She was a cousin of Sarangan's and cut out from her cradle to be his wife and would have been his wife in spite of the stars in her horoscope had Sarangan's father kept his money-bags with himself and not in a bank. A Deputy Collector he had died in harness while yet with many years of happy service ahead of him; the stroke was sudden, it was the failure of the Arbuthnot's with whom he had all his earnings, touching, it was said, to at least five figures. He was dependent on an elder brother for his education and career and when his wife came home she had brave new views about the joint family system of living and her views becoming louder he was swayed between her and his brother; the symbol of the Government which he served danced ever before his eyes—the lion and the unicorn fighting for the crown; his crown of happiness lost all lustre and turned into a mere bone of contention. And the failure of the Bank had been merciful. Sarangan was a boy of five when he died and with the little money that was left could only become a stenotypist. His mother had to bury her ambitions of seeing him high in office waited on by belted peons; but she never had the faintest doubt that her brother would go against his word. A *mirasdar* mates with money, she consoled herself with the thought, but unfortunately in her brother's case, the money happened to be mildewed. When Komalam joined her husband she found him a dyspepsy and began her married bliss in the role of a ministering angel. And Sarangan began his, with a memory that was beautiful as a dream.

Komalam's husband was in a nursing home in the city; she stayed at her aunt's. The cousins had met during

annual or more frequent visits to one another; this was the first time they were living beneath the same roof for a longer period than they had ever lived. Their talk of 'if-I-had-married-you' though done innocently and with a careless freedom concealed a little ardour and Sarangan's wife, Nachi, did not fail to notice it. In the penumbra of doubt she lived and wept; the coldness of her husband threw her into alternate fits of depression and jealousy. Komalam's beauty was her humiliation; her husband's childish dependence on his mother, further still. She felt awfully inferior, a diminutive.

'Don't wrestle with that confounded pump, aunt,' said Komalam and all the three walked back to the hall. The afternoon hours were sunlit and somnolent and Komalam found the home atmosphere grape-cool and sweet after the three hours' stay with her husband amid poultice and ointments and pungent odours.

'Where is Nachi?' Komalam asked. The mother looked at the son and the son looked at the mother and this exchange of mute inquiry caused a smile on her face. She peeped into a room adjacent to the hall and found Nachi stretched on the floor, obviously asleep. She shook her by the shoulders calling her name but all she got was a peevish reply: 'Don't disturb me.'

'Wake up, dear,' she said softly, 'it is time for the toilet. I have bought heaps of roses and jasmine on my way home. Come, let us plait our hair.'

'You attend to your own. I have a bad headache.'

'You are lying. Is it because Sarangan . . .'

'Now shut up. You seem to take much delight in uttering his name.'

'Why not I? He's my cousin.'

'Cousin indeed,' she sneered and repeated more sneeringly.

'Your heart is not as fair as your skin, my dear.' And Komalam rejoined her aunt and cousin in the hall and from the expression on their faces understood that they had heard a part of the colloquy.

She took out her toilet things from the almirah,—a fine Belgian mirror, a bottle of lavender oil, brush, black delicate-toothed comb, a pot of polished sandalwood containing vermilion. The aunt arranged the flowers on a silver tray while Komalam, loosening the knot of her hair rubbed the scented oil deep into it and began to comb and brush, her face partly hidden and appearing like moon through dishevelled clouds. Sarangan watched with unconcealed admiration the rhythmic swing of her wrists and the undulant grace of her body, and when she propped the mirror against the window and began to plait her locks it seemed to him that waters flowed out of the mirror and laved her limbs as seawaves a beautiful nymph of the sea. He watched on and a sigh unconsciously escaped his lips, eloquent and soft of a delicious pain for the unattainable. And he was not aware that his wife passed by with jealous anger simmering on her face. She went up to the terrace, passed back quick to her room, with dresses dried in the sun rolled in her hands. She shut the door with a bang and Komalam turned round with a mischievous smile. 'Why is she so cross to-day?' she asked and though the question was not addressed in particular to anybody Sarangan answered: 'It is new moon to-morrow,' a remark which justified his ways to his wife.

Komalam finished her toilet and as she was about to go up to the tub outside for a wash Sarangan said to her: 'I have a programme for you and mother.'

'And what is that?'

'To the pictures. For the matinee show. It's three now and we have full twenty minutes to get ourselves ready.'

'What about Nachi? Why not she come too?'

'I am not standing in the way.'

Hastily washing her face and hands and giving the ending touch to her toilet Komalam dressed plainly but with excellent taste and was ready to start for the movie. She knocked at the door of Nachi's room but got no response.

Sarangan then addressed his invisible wife that they were all going out, that she could emerge out of her seclusion, and hurried his cousin and mother down. He left word with his landlord occupying the ground floor that they would be back by six in the evening and requesting the old landlady to keep company with his wife if the latter, who was not coming with them, cared and called for.

But the call did not come though the door opened and Nachi stepped out knowing that she was left alone to herself. She saw the comb and the brush lying on the floor, with a few rose petals strewn about them, and the mirror perched on the windowsill. Near it was a tiny ball of hair rolling and trembling in the breeze and this, the shameful aftermath of the toilet, maddened her more than the sweated garments of the women, after their hasty change, tumbled in twenty stinking rings in the corner. She looked into the mirror and shrank back shivering ; the face was hollow and the eyes red as hibiscus buds. Once he had loved her, but that love was dead ; she was a mere drudge, grubbing and slaving, scowled on by the mother-in-law. And now the fair cousin of her husband had added to her torments, broken the last delicate link, and seemed to glorify in her vicious victory. Yes, life had treated her badly, making her buoyant youth crabbed and gray. Her throat tightened ; and through the tears hotly blurring she peered at the memory of herself as she was in the first brief year of her happiness with her husband. She bit her lip in an agony of despair and rushing back to her room closed the door.

*

They returned when evening was falling and the lamps were lighted. They climbed the stairs laughing and commenting upon the picture they had just seen. Comments of living shadows upon shadows that lived. The hall was plunged in darkness and the bronze lamp in the niche stood slimy with yesterday's oil, half-burnt wick, and dripping round the base. They found the door of the hall room still shut ; in the kitchen there were no signs of cooking against supper. The women felt fear like a ghostly hand laid on them and shivered. Sarangan lit the hurricane lantern and the blue spurt of flame when the match was struck, sprawled and sputtered out ominously. They banged at the door which was strongly bolted from the inside ; the landlord came up attracted by the noise ; at his heel his wife and children. They chipped out the piece of wood where the bolt was and thrust open the doors. Sarangan was the first to enter the room, and the lantern he carried hit upon a figure dangling from the roof. Beneath it was an upturned chair.

Nachi was cold, limp, heavy ; all her young years seemed to have lived one electric moment of anguish and then rushed turbidly into death ; and death had wrapped her body in the stiff bark of an aged tree.

Komalam came closer ; the light was now full on the hanging figure, and running a horrified and lidless glance over it she gave a shriek and staggered to the wall.

The discovery was too harrowing. It seemed to rush her blood to the head. For it was with *her* saree that the wretched girl had hanged !

In dreadful fear and awe the offender knelt before the Goddess.'

BROKEN FAITH

By MANNAR KADAMBY

THE Goddess Mari wore a fierce look. Her dark eyebrows knitted in anger. Even in the dimness of the oil-flame, the blood-thirsty tongue glowed with an infernal glow. It hungered for more blood. The very atmosphere was threatening and death hung in the air. There was an unearthly silence and nothing moved in the imprisoned air of the chamber. Darkness everywhere save for the lurid flame which spent itself by throwing a faint gleam on the face of the goddess. In the stillness of the room the lamp burnt with a lifeless steadiness and cast an undefined but frightful shadow of the image on the uneven surface of the wall. The incense smouldered into a rich drowsy scent which finding no escape filled the air with a sense of oppression; the smoke rose in a thin fleecy cloud

and curled to disappear in the shrouded darkness of the ceiling. This disappearance gave the smoke something of the mysterious; it looked a thin phosphorescent gossamer which ascended in an endless journey—moving up and moving to nowhere.

All this brought a dreadful fear and awe to the offender who was kneeling in reverential prayer. The fierce expression of the deity, lit by the indistinct rays of the lamp forebode a terrible punishment—terrible because it was undefined yet certain to come. It requires a more courageous heart than that of an ardent devotee, to enter such a temple in the hour of midnight. But with this sinner, a young widow, fear drove away another fear—a fear that it would be adding a fresh and an unpardonable offence not to own up the first and make amends by an adequate penance. The nature of the misdeed was unknown to her and concerned her less. It was certain that she had committed some wrong. Her faith in the divine justice was so strong that she refused to believe in her own innocence. Because, why should the all-merciful Mariamma visit her only son with such a dreadful disease, if not to correct an erring daughter? It is true that when the first symptoms of the plague-fever showed on her boy, it set her thinking of the possibilities of any transgression on her part. She turned over the pages of her life in a crude but sincere way and could not find a single instance where she had overstepped the divine law. Her faith did not fail. She only thought that the fault must have been overlooked in her hasty retrospective search. She went over the whole thing again, from her obedient child days to the loss of her husband to whom she was fondly devoted. Even when her husband died she expressed no resentment against the Goddess for having taken him away in the prime of his life, and her so young. Was it not her own greed that sent him to his death? She wanted to provide her boy a schooling which their neighbours never thought of providing their sons; she wanted him to know the strange thing Reading, and be like one of those brahmin boys who looked more like beings from a higher world altogether. Perhaps, the desire was too much, even unholy, since she tried to group her son with the highest caste. When her husband started with a promise of higher wages and one of the indentured labour to work in some tea estate in Ceylon, she gladly sent him. That was her mistake. He returned home after six months with little money saved, but his health so broken that he was scarcely able to move unassisted. He soon died. It was a terrible blow to her. But she patiently resigned herself to her sad lot and sought solace in her child. Her widowed life was entirely occupied by nursing her son who was sickly from his first breath. His delicate health worried her; a slight ailment made her extremely anxious and she prayed long and fervidly on each occasion for an immediate recovery. The child was everything in her life, her only treasure in this barren world. She worked, prayed, and hoped for his happiness. Nothing else mattered to her. She nursed him as only a mother can nurse her child. It was the one joy, the one happiness in her life of want, poverty, and misery. When her husband was living he brought home every evening, the next day's ragi and salt. She attended to his comfort which took little time and the rest of her attention was wholly centred in nursing the child and playing with him. How considerate her husband was, how easily pleased! Once in a way if she went to the neighbouring fields and collected the wild beans to add a curry to the frugal meal of ragi, he would think it a delicacy and feel almost grateful. He was so different from the other husbands who were all brutal and beat their wives in the open street. The wives took the cruelty as a matter of course and seemed none the discontented for it. It was so common that nobody thought anything strange or ill about it and indeed, her own husband was talked about as an unmanly coward who was afraid to punish his wife and had no right to wear a moustache. Perhaps, she

thought, God deemed her not good enough to possess such a husband for long and death separated them. Now, she had to do the earning also, she was both father and mother to her child. The cooly work in the fields which fetched her the living—if partial starvation could be called so—took most of her time and left little for the care of the boy. His weak frame became weaker and fell an easy prey to the epidemic. These things her primitive brain could not understand. She thought and firmly believed that it was a visitation of some retributory wrath from the heavens. The same day, at the hour of midnight when the Goddess is least cruel, she hurried to the temple to crave for Her mercy. She wanted to know the penalty that would appease Her anger.

After a long time of silence during which even her gentle breathing could be heard her prayer broke in a soft voice filling the dismal hollowness of the room with its devotional melody.

'You see what I mean, Mariamma. Bless me with your forgiveness. Favour me with any other punishment, and I shall bear it cheerfully. Spare me that one suffering ; don't take away my son. Forgive my sin. Who can dare anger you and yet hope to live ? Don't I know your powers ? A single wave of your hand, Mariamma, and the whole world would be nowhere—utterly annihilated. I am a sinner but it is incomplete ignorance that I have sinned. I am prepared to suffer any torture that you may think fit to subject me to but only save my boy's life. Name your choice of any other life and you shall have it. Tomorrow, early in the morning you shall have the youngest and fattest lamb. You know that I have even sold myself and promised to be his slave for buying me the best lamb in the neighbourhood. If my boy was not fatherless I would have willingly offered myself and put an end to his pain. Have mercy, my Mariamma, and why should he, the innocent, suffer for my sins ? After my death there is no one in the entire world to speak a kind word to him. It is this that prevents me from sacrificing myself to you. I would not shrink from any pain, any torture to save his life. Make him strong and able to look after himself, and I promise, I vow myself to immmediately offer my life to you—gratefully. You are the world-mother and there are thousands of your sons and daughters here. Certainly, you understand the aching heart of a mother. I have endured many troubles but this I cannot. It is beyond me. Please save him, oh, do save him ! My vow stands and I shall come to you to offer my warm blood. Please accept my pledge and show me your blessing by giving back this flower.'

With a slow nervous hand she rested a flower on Her feet and begged the divine favour with suppliant eyes. The flower, almost immediately after she withdrew, fell from its holy lodge to the basement of the pedestal. She caught the flower greedily and pressed it to her eyes with the utmost thankfulness and reverence and stuck it on her hair. After a brief pause, she sprang up suddenly as if roused abruptly from a reverie and exclaimed, 'Oh, my generous benefactress !' The still air was stirred up by her sudden motion and enlivened the naked flame to a quiver. The ghostly shadows danced in mimicry. The thin cloud of smoke wafted a little to this side and that ; finally resumed the original ascent leaving no trace of the disturbance save for a loose curl of translucent white that floated to the top. These were the first signs of life that the dismal atmosphere showed and she was startled. But the next moment she darted to Her feet and kissed them in frenzy. Oh, those kisses ! If those feet were only flesh and blood, one of her kisses would have fetched her the entire forgiveness. But it was different and She gave to none of the weaknesses of the mortals and remained unmoved, majestic, supremely calm.

'I knew you couldn't be cruel,' she nestled close to Her and caressed Her

feet with her hand. Fear had left her voice and it was almost cajoling. You are so kind and I shall try to deserve your kindness. To-morrow, in addition to the lamb, I shall bring a potful of the best toddy, my good Mariamma. It is very dear now but I shall bring it somehow, you cannot go without it. When my son grows to a big boy—he will be the finest lad in the village! I shall tell him how he owes his life to you and that he should spend his whole life in repaying the debt. I have left him alone and I must go to him.' With a final obeisance she left the temple.

It was completely dark outside. A cold breeze brushed her cheeks and she found it was raining. Immediately her thoughts flew to her hut or rather to its hay—thatched roof which though sheltered them from the sun was too weak against the rain. She hurried, nearly ran to her home as fast as the wet clinging saree could allow her. Darkness did not check her speed for, had she been even blindfolded she would have returned home with a certainty, without any grope or stumble—so familiar had she grown to that path. When she had run for upwards half an hour, her hut showed itself by faint patches of rain at the lighted crevices of the bamboo-woven door. Though she was too eager to get in and look to any leak wetting his bed, she stopped at the door stung by the memory of her child's rebuke. She had left him alone the previous day and gone to the fields to work. In the evening when she returned, he innocently remarked, 'Mother, you don't care for me at all. If only father were here he would have always remained with me especially now that I am ill.' He did not know that his words stabbed her heart. She knew full well that if she should miss one day's work she could not provide him with any milk, which was so essential. She did not mind—no, she would have been too glad to starve herself and nurse him. But what about his food? He should not feel any want. It compelled her to leave him alone in the hut and go to the cooly work. This night, she had stolen from him to the temple to escape a painful repetition of his reproach. And so, she stopped at the door and listened. There was no sound inside except the drip of the leaking rain. 'Thank god,' she murmured, 'he is still asleep and hasn't missed me.' She gently pushed open the door and entered. He was in a deep slumber, a rest he most needed. There were three—no, four leaks, but none was over the bed. Near one corner, there was a tiny leak which had collected into a puddle and was creeping in a fine rill towards the bed. She wanted to move the bed but she was soaked all through and was afraid to touch it, lest she should wet it. She had no change. The only other saree was used to pillow her son's sick head and not for the world would she remove it and disturb his sleep. Drying her saree as much as possible by wringing the loose ends, she pulled the bed to a safe distance from the water and placed an earthern pot to catch the dripping rain and keep it from running. Before she huddled herself up in a corner of the room, she cast a long loving look at the restful face and once again thanked the Goddess for having answered her prayers. She never even felt the chill of the wet saree. Overcome by fatigue she fell asleep.

The next morning a cheerful sun broke in and shone brilliantly. The lingering raindrops that clung to the edge of the roof glittered through the bright rays of the sun and formed a fringe of dazzling beads. Here and there a drop swelled and fell splintering on the moist clay. The poor widow was still asleep. A beam of sunshine from a small hole in the eastern wall travelled across the room and warmed her feet. She woke. Her eyes blinked at the sudden brightness and she cursed herself for having slept so long. Her first thoughts were to look at her son. The same sunbeam that woke her, swept across his livid face before reaching her. He had not moved, and how strange! She stared and stared, her eyes dilated with fear, at the rigid face. A convulsion of terror twisted her. She

shuddered. 'It can't be, no, no—it is not possible,' she screamed and rushing to him, held his head between her hands. 'Tell me please—please, my child! my own darling—you cannot—will not go away from me. Why are you so—so—oh, why not speak!' Her hands trembled. Slowly, the truth crept to her mind. He was dead—dead and gone somewhere from which there is no return. No, nothing she could do would ever bring him back. He was lost—irrevocably lost. A sense of utter desolation swept upon her; she felt the whole world empty. She could no longer hold, and the cold head dropped from her hands. If only she could have wept and spent her choking grief! No, there was not even a tear in her blank expressionless eyes. She sat motionless gazing into the nothingness that yawned before her.

Minutes passed and ran into the greater part of an hour. She remained motionless with the same empty look in her eyes. She saw nothing, heard nothing. The chirping of birds, the barks of the dogs, or even the noisy brawl of her neighbours did not reach her. A shrill young voice of a cowboy came over the noise of the village. It floated nearer and clearer. It was a country ballad in praise of the mighty powers of the Goddess. Somehow, it found its way to her and struck a jarring note. At the beginning it was something like a faint voice in a dream. Gradually it became louder and she could hear the ballad. A dark flash shone in her eyes. There was a big doubt that doubted the existance of the Goddess. Her lips which had remained closed and dead for so long, parted in a painful twitch. 'You liar,' she cried as though seized by a paroxysm of anger. 'She is nothing but a piece of stone and a monster who revels in human slaughter. I shall show you how—I shall.' She dashed forward and stumbling the high threshold fell prone on the floor, in a merciful swoon which drowned her grief.

The cowboy, utterly ignorant of the effects of his song on a suffering heart, continued in the amusement save for the brief interruptions which were necessary to swear at the cattle that moved slower than his slow feet. Instinctively he stopped near the great aspen tree. He was hurt by a cluster of bats that hung in drowzy laziness to the branches. What right had they to enjoy leisure when he was so active and busy? Picking up a stone he pelted at the lazy dark group and was vaguely satisfied to hear the flutter of the wings and the inarticulate noise of the panic-stricken things. The cattle moved and the cowboy passed. The bats settled down again.

The sun rose higher and higher in the vault of blue and the innumerable footprints on the path oozed into small pools of water which mirrored and multiplied him a thousand times. The day was bright, gay, and indeed more cheerful than many other cheerful days. A grief that was gnawing and devouring the heart of a mother scarcely created small a ripple in the cruel placid world.

BLISS REGAINED

By M. R. M. SUNDARAM

THE sun was setting.

Bakyam was returning home from the woods, balancing a heavy basket on her head and a scythe on her right shoulder. A little lamb with a tiny bell tinkling from its neck was bounding behind her. The setting sun with its rich golden light silhouetted these figures beautifully: the girl with the basket and the lamb with its bell.

She cut downward from the bank of the canal, crossed the green fields, and stepping to the hedgerow of her dwelling, kicked open the small door with her pretty ankleted foot. Entering the yard she emptied the contents of the basket in a corner, tethered the unwilling lamb to a peg, and strewed some leaves within its reach.

Having lit an earthen lamp she finished her frugal meal and setting everything in order sat down on the threshold. She felt lonely, her mother having left in the morning for the village near by. From where she sat she could see a portion of the landscape darkened by the night. There was the crescent moon sailing through the multitude of stars. The trees were gently rustling, with fire-flies twinkling about their leaves; and from the distance rose the loud chorus of frogs.

While she was in the middle of a ballad which she was gently humming, a strong odour of tobacco attacked her nostrils. Raising her head she saw behind the hedge-gate a small fiery spot, and behind it dark against a hay-stack the dim shape of a tall man.

'Who's that?'

'A thief!' replied a laughing voice and the door creaked.

'Oh, is it you? But you must not come in. I'm alone.'

'I know you are alone. That's why I came.'

Ponnan walked towards her deliberately, throwing up the cigar-bit which coursed through the darkness in a semicircle and fell outside the hedge. He was hardly midway towards the hut when the girl withdrew inside and closing the door with a bang, drove in the latch firmly.

'Oh no, don't,' cried he, running up. 'Open, my girl. It's not fair,' he pleaded, knocking fastly and violently.

A shrill laughter rang from within. 'Get away, you brute of a man. Go and blow your head against the nearest wall!'

'I can't go. I won't go. I'll be knocking on till you open.'

'Then I'll cry for help.'

'There, there! Say don't you pity a poor starving man, who has eaten nothing for the evening; who has neither father nor mother, nor a sweet girl like you to cook for him? Just give me a morsel of something.'

'Are you really hungry?'

'Devilish hungry, my dear!'

'You promise you won't be naughty?'

'On my eyes.'

The latch clicked and he stepped inside. 'What a fuss you make,' exclaimed he, closing the door leisurely and driving home the bolt with infinite care.

'Why do you close the door? Keep it open.'

With hands on hips he regarded her silently for a space of time and said coolingly, 'Do you want the bats to fly in and beat their wings against your face? Never you mind.'

And he laughed with his braying voice.

She stood there close against the wall, in all her rustic beauty, in all her shyness, her breast heaving in fright, and her face softly beaming in the glow

of the little lamp. She pointed a trembling finger at a corner and said, 'There's some rice in that pot there.'

'Don't you bother about food. In fact I'm not hungry.'

Her eyes dilated and her heart beat faster. He who had so long been devouring her through the eyes now sprang at her, and before she could guess what was happening, crushed her to his breast showering ardent kisses all over her face. She struggled, beat at his face with her hands, tried to cry out but could not.

'Do be quiet,' whispered he.

She struggled once again with all her strength, but finding him irresistible made up her mind to yield. She laughed shyly, confusedly, and looked at the burning lamp. He blew it out with a single breath.

Outside, the moon was bleeding to death on the far horizon. The stars were brighter than ever and the Milky-way was thicker. The trees nodded in sleep and the wind whistled over the fields.

Dew began to fall. The wind had dropped. A shadow crept out of the hut followed by the words of Bakyam: 'Don't fail to come and speak to mother!'

'Oh, yes.'

The lamb stirred, raised its voice once, and became motiontess and silent again.

*

Bakyam was holding a worn-out mirror in front of her face and taming with restless fingers a few wild locks of hair that were intruding on her brow. Her mother, all silver and wrinkles, was plaiting her dark rich hair into a serpentine pattern.

'Why are you moody, Bakyam?'

'Moody? Not at all.'

She heaved a sigh and her gaze strayed away from the mirror and settled lingeringly on a hut far off, beyond the pool. She rose up hurriedly, adjusted her sari in position and placing a pitcher on her hip walked off briskly. Her destination was the canal but she walked towards the hut where her gaze had doted on a little while ago.

'Is it you, my girlie?' Ponnan greeted her.

She talked without looking at his face, nervously clutching the hem of her sari. 'Why haven't you talked with mother yet?'

'Eh, what's all this, my girl, talking with mother and all that? I don't understand.'

She replied after a pause, 'Surely after what you have done, you must offer to . . .' She swallowed the rest of the sentence.

'Offer to what?'

She broke the barrier of shame.

'Offer to marry me, of course.'

He laughed cruelly.

'Marriage indeed! As if I would be tied to you! My grannie, what a suggestion to make and what a thing to do! Not I, my girl, not I. Come, let us not bother about marriage and all that rot. Step in, let us have a pleasant time.'

She could not contain her indignation. There were angry tears in her eyes. She was scandalised. She stared at him like a lioness. Quite indifferent to her feelings, Ponnan tired to pinch her cheek saying, 'No fuss,' but she pushed him back with force and ran. He followed her ejaculating meaningless words, but her feet were fleeter.

When she placed the filled-up pitcher down, her mother asked her, 'Why so late?'

The question was not answered. Bakyam went into the yard to while away her time with her mute companion, the lamb, and to weep away her angiush beside it.

The days that followed were days of torment to her. She was restless by day and sleepless by night. The man had trifled with her, taken her cheap, and cheated her. His coarse

laughter, his coarser words, disgusted her, and crushed her simple soul. She threw the greater portion of the blame on herself. She had yielded to the call too thoughtlessly, in a moment of frenzy. She ought to have shown greater sterness, better sense. She had lost her head over a serious affair.

Without reserve she approached him many a time and pleaded with tearful voice, fell on her kness, begged, prayed, appealed to him in the name of duty, invoked a thousand gods to her witness, but all to no purpose. *He* would have none of her. He was not at all obliged to risk anything for her. True he, owed her something, which he would make good with a few jewels. Bakyam, whose pride was thus wounded, threw the proffered jewels at his face.

In course of time the truth that she was soon to be a mother pressed itself into her knowledge. She was wriggling between the jaws of terror. She quaked to think of a terrible scandal.

'What'll they say of me when they know it?'

'I don't care for what the devils and donkeys might say. I have nothing to do with it.'

'You have,' she cried flaming up.

He shrugged his shoulders, showed his back to her and walked away. She pulled him by his cloth.

'So you refuse? You refuse to save me from the scandal? Do you?' She could not say anything more. And in her weakness and in the strength of her right she spat on his face. His eyes glowed, his moustache trembled, the brute in him rose up with a growl. With a singular courage he pushed her violently down with a curse and rushed away.

*

'Mother,' said Bakyam, burying her face in the folds of her mother's sari, sobbing and panting like a child that had risen up from a night mare.

The old woman was terrified by this sudden, unusual exhibition of sorrow. Lifting the girl's face she demanded, 'Why do you weep? What's the matter with you?'

Then amidst sobs and tears, Bakyam made her confession.

Both of them wept; they were weak, poor, and helpless.

'I'll speak to him,' said the mother.

'No, don't,' pleaded the daughter.

But the old woman heeded not. She bent her tottering steps towards the distant hut, full of hope, full of confidence in her power of persuasion. 'Certainly he would listen to an old woman about to die,' she said to herself.

But he did not. She returned home with a painful face, her eyes streaming and her heart bleeding.

'What a misfortune you have brought on me in my tottering age! I wish I were dead!'

She sank on the ground and sobbed. Bakyam nestled close to her and the two became silent after a time.

In the small hours of the morning, just when the first cock crew, Bakyam woke up.

'Mother, wake up,' she called out, shaking the old woman gently. 'Mother,' she called again shaking her a little violently.

But the dead never awake.

*

The little lamb owned by Bakyam had now grown into a sheep and she had given birth to a pair of darling lambs. With the heavy udder weighing her down she moved about the yard, troubled and teased by the young ones. She went near a hammock hanging from the pial-beam and sneezed twice. The hammock shook and from inside it a baby raised its voice and cired lustily.

Bakyam emerged out of the hut. She had greatly changed. She was only the ghost, a shadowy trace of what she had been. She was lean and pale. Her steps were infirm. Her eyes were lustreless and small.

She peeped into the hammock. The child was kicking its legs and waving his arms in the air. She took him gently and affectionately into her

arms and suckled him. Bestowing a pair of kisses on each of his cheeks, she replaced him in the hammock and gently rocking it, sang a pastoral lullaby in a deep, moving voice.

The refrain of her song floated towards the surrounding groves and were echoed back in succession. And the echoes were sad and faint.

Unknown to herself two drops of tears trickled down from her eyes.

She wove into her song all the trials she had undergone, all the anguish she had borne. Her lyrical outbursts had the emotional power of moving whoever that might hear them, into tears of tenderness.

No wonder a man hid himself behind the nearest haystack to hear her songs.

Bakyam bent over the child and found him sleeping, and in his sleep, smiling and weeping alternately. A quick train of thoughts and realities hurried across her mind: the days of labour and pain, the outcry of scandal, her forced seclusion and poverty and toil.

She had sold out the last trinket she had about her. She had no rice for the morrow. As a last resort she had in contemplation the sale of the sheep and the lambs, so dear to her.

But for the child she would have courted death. She loved the child and hence must keep the lamp of her life burning at all cost. She would do anything, sacrifice anything for the happiness of her child.

While her inner life was thus pulsing, Ponnan had come out of his hiding place behind the haystack and was standing a few yards away from her, transforming the weight of his body from one leg to the other. He managed to attract her attention by coughing and asked after an undue pause, 'Will you make a reply to-day at least ?'

Her eyes were fixed on him but she seemed to be looking only at vacancy.

'How many times am I to beg your pardon? Just consider what a change it would make if you only say Yes. You needn't starve as you do now. You need'nt work. You can give the child better feeding and better clothing,' and he again paused.

He went near the hammock and looked in. His lips curved into an awkward smile. Then the smile faded away and was replaced by a sad twist. He winked his eyes a number of times in order to withhold his tears.

Conscious of a hot jet of air blowing on his neck he drew up his form to find Bakyam standing very near him with a sad smile on her lips.

DAUGHTER INDIA

By AUNDY

TO marry a married lady during the life-time of her husband is ever sensational, and the Madras dailies had, therefore, justification enough for the publication of my marriage with Mrs Sarada Sundaram L.M.P., in huge headlines. Even our temporary shift to the Modern Cafe, with a view to respect the susceptibilities of her good father, the Collector, was given wide publicity, and Sarada and myself were in consequence flooded with a train of interviewers and correspondents. A real "nine-days' wonder flared through" the City and special At Homes and Dinners, arranged by friends and reformers, continued for a fortnight.

But the name, as well as the episode, of Kamala, the widow, who had accompanied me to Madras all the way from Trivandrum to marry me and who had voluntarily sacrificed her claims in favour of Sarada, were, at her own wise injunction, carefully suppressed by us. Even her father, the shrewd vakil, Erachikulam Theevatti Subramania Iyer, didn't suspect her secret hand in the marriage. But he, with another sinister motive, had shifted with her from the Collector's house to the Hindu Hotel soon after the announcement of the marriage.

It was the next day after he had shifted, when his serpentine eyes were betraying his conspiring thoughts as he stood gazing, like Trebonius, at the wallclock which adorned the spacious hall of the upper floor of the Hindu Hotel.

'Nabaskara, Bakeel *Zami*!' greeted the funny cook of my father's household as he entered the hall.

'When?' enquired the stolid Mr Iyer, who was evidently expecting somebody else.

'Yesterday gome, *Zami*—morning drain, young master, Bicha *Z*ami, and Barrister *Z*undara *Z*ami's wife, *Z*aradamma—both married. Hold master and *Z*aradamma's father don't knows hanything. Segret marriage, *Z*ami—hagainst *Z*arkar Laws. Hold master received delgram hanonymous. Heevil days—dears in 'is eyes. I meets Bicha Zami to-day and *Z*aradamma halso; they lives Modern Gafe. *Z*aradamma says: "Nebar mind, *Z*ubbaroya Botti! Seben 'ears jail—returns hafterbards and marries hagain." What brabery, *Z*ami! *Z*aradamma's fader, collegeddor *Z*ami, bery sorry. My mind hafraid.'

'Come alone?' enquired the wily Vakil.

'Hold Master halso gome. Put up in Collegeddor Zami's 'ouse. Your daughter, Gamalamma—doing well, Zami?'

'Kamala!'

'Yes, father.' Kamala entered.

'Here's somebody to entertain you.' The Vakil hurriedly walked out as the clock struck three.

'Bicha *Z*ami and *Z*aradamma goming 'ere now,' communicated the Poti cautiously to Kamala. 'I—segret messenger beforehand—from *Z*aradamma.'

Kamala looked up at him in surprise.

'I knows all, Gamalamma,' continued the cook smiling. '*Z*aradamma tolds me eberything. But do you knows Barrister *Z*undara *Z*ami halso gome 'ere? I seen him now. Put up next room this same 'otel. I goes hurgendly hinform *Z*aradamma.'

Scarcely had he gone out when the Barrister himself entered, followed by the leaneyed Iyer carrying a leather suitcase.

Kamala instantaneously vanished into her room.

'This insult,' began the Barrister seating himself on a chair, 'is painfully piercing to my honour and I am dreadfully put out about it.'

'The villain! Commencing with discussions on Gandhi and Social Reform, he has eloped with your wife!' Mr Iyer faced the window as he spoke.

'Had I not received your message, I could never have known it.'

'But the news appeared in all the dailies?'

'I'm no reader of newspapers,' replied Sundaram.

'The two must have been developing an unholy intimacy, I should suppose, even while they were at Trivandrum.'

'Most true! That was why I whipped the girl out of my house that day.'

'Promising to marry my daughter, the fellow has bitten my ear!' Mr Iyer wiped an imaginary teardrop off his right eye.

'Light women are more attractive than those heavy with virtue,' remarked Sundaram.

'The good Collector came twice in his car to take me back to his house. But we didn't go. Kamala feels the jilting so much that she insisted upon her being left alone in her present isolation.

'I should think it fortunate for her that she has escaped from this Don Juan. But look at my disgrace!' sighed the Barrister. 'Scandalising me openly as a faithless husband, the adulteress has married her paramour! Had I been the meanest person in the world, she could hardly have behaved more rudely than she did. Did ever anybody see a husband treated with more contempt than I?'

'You are the jilted man and Kamala is the jilted woman. Both in the same boat!'

'Isn't that she inside?' interrupted Sundaram.

'Yes.'

'And he preferred that cat to this parrot?'

'Parrot or sparrow—the cat has driven it away.'

'But the wide world will shelter it all the same!'

'But who in this wide world ever offers to marry a widow 008·25 even in these days? It's but the dregs and beggars of society that come forward,' clinched Mr Iyer bluntly and watched the effect.

'Oh, what do you take me for?'

'Do you propose seriously?' Mr Iyer half-smiled.

'I should think I do. I could find no other way of rebuilding my ruined happiness.'

'And revenge?'

'Yes, that first and then alone marriage.'

'Well, then file the complaint at once.'

'Complaint? Let the dogs hang themselves. I won't be drawn into a criminal litigation as well!' The Barrister turned down the idea.

'Bosh! A mere threat may fetch you a cheque for ten thousand, man. But more of it presently—walls have ears—. Kamala!'

Kamala peeped out.

'Keep this suitcase safe in our room. We are going out.'

'There's my pistol inside it, madam. It's not locked. And so take care, please, will you?' And he turned back with an experienced meaning for wink at her.

Kamala stood stupefied for a few minutes after they were gone. And then she darted into her room with the suitcase.

II

Scarcely had she gone in when I and Sarada entered.

'What is her room no., Sarada?' I asked.

'Ten. There it is!'

'Well, we can't stay here long. We've to go to Adyar, mind you, and drive back to the Triplicane beach meeting before five. I am going to move the resolution on Divorce to-day,' said I, and knocked at the door.

'I'm too poorly clad for all that,' remarked Sarada smiling.

'No, you're decent enough.'

'Maybe—as our matrimony is to last but for a day or two.'

The door opened and Kamala entered.

'Hullo, sister!' And Sarada caught her in an enthusiastic embrace. 'We are not fit to lick the dust of your holy shoe. This unredeemable debt which binds us beneath your laws, dares not accept our sacrifice of freedom without paying you homage for it.'

'I congratulate you, sister,' said Kamala, 'on the tranquillity which at last your soul has recovered.'

'*Your* tranquillity, Kamala,' said I, 'is more eloquent in its silence. But its dynamic potentialities we are afraid of, and they impel us to get from you an assurance of safety to your person.'

'Mind me not, please,' replied she, 'all my anxieties are about *your* future.'

'We know what we'll get—imprisonment—and are prepared for it,' said I.

'True, but you may be separated within the next hour. My conscience pricks me at my cowardice in thrusting you ahead and hiding behind.' And Kamala uttered a little sob of pain.

'Even this present meeting may prove to be our last,' said I, to divert her thoughts.

'Yes, we can't foresee what may happen, nor what we'll do nor whereform,' she began. 'Whatever be your views on your so-called myth of Love, it alone teaches the minds of lovers unexpected stratagems. I don't regard you, Sarada, as separate from me. You are the beloved of my beloved. Whatever humble service this poor slave of yours be offering at your feet, be kind enough to honour me by your acceptance of it.' Kamala wiped her tears.

'It pains me to see that you who ought to console us are giving yourself up to grief and tears,' said I.

'Had I known that it would cost your heart such great anguish, I would never have consented to take him from you,' put in Sarada.

'Forgive me, Sarada. You err in saying so. My tears were for something else.'

'What for?'

'The depressing thought, that it might take a century for my less-cultured sisters of India even to dream of freedom, unhinged me. Had you been in my place, you could not have behaved otherwise.'

'Remember, noble Kamala,' exclaimed Sarada holding her friend's hands in hers, 'that I am going to be the firebrand of the New Cult! I'll see that each home in India produces, within the next decade, a rebellious daughter like me!'

'Kamala rested her pensive head on Sarada's shoulder in silence, her hands irresolutely playing with the latter's, when the door opened admitting Sundaram and Mr Iyer, followed by the Collector, my father, and another short, old pot-bellied gentleman.

Sundaram was the first to see Kamala's pose. Her father too got a glimpse of it before she woke up from her reverie.

'What are you doing here?' asked the Vakil confused, taken aback.

'What's this?' exclaimed the Barrister in evident surprise.

'My duty,' replied Kamala and ran into her room, and bolted the door from within.

'Well, let us be seated here,' said the pot-bellied old stranger, disclosing his pan-filled but toothless mouth, as he made himself comfortable in an armchair.

Sundaram moved to the nearest window, as if to take a view of the prospect in front.

My father and Mr Sarma seated themselves silently on either side of the old stranger and did not waste even a glance on me or Sarada.

But the pot-bellied stranger was staring at us, and Mr Iyer, intermittently in evident inquisitiveness.

'They are Pichai and Sarada,' said the Vakil.

'I see, why don't you be seated then?' said the stranger, addressing me.

'Thank you,' said I, 'but we are leaving.'

'No, please. You mustn't. Chance put me and my client here face to face with these two old friends of mine. Isn't it a happier chance that put you two also here ?'

'May I know by whom I have the honour to be thus addressed ?' I asked.

'I am your father's old classmate and Mr Sundaram's new legal adviser, Vengu Iyengar.'

'The famous Law Vengu Iyengar,' Mr Iyer supplemented.

'Retired Advocate-General and Law-member, who led the deputation against social legislation ?'

'Yes, that self-same old-world individual.'

'Why do you hold us up ?' I asked.

'We, elders, are trying to find a way out of this unfortunate impasse. Can't you help us with your suggestions ?'

'I'm afraid my opinions may not carry conviction to this group.'

'There will be no impasse at all,' suggested Sarada, 'if you could induce your client to wash his hands clean of me.'

'Easily said, madam. But it costs a good deal to do it.'

'On the other hand,' began Mr Iyer, 'he demands that you be brought to justice, that the sacred institution of marriage may be handled with more respect by at least the generations to come.'

'Yes, that's just why I remarried,' put in Sarada.

'Shut up, impure bitch!' shouted Sundaram.

'Don't bark, mongrel!' sneered Sarada.

'Jade!'

'Dirty cur!'

'No, no! This tone will not help us,' ruled the old advocate. 'Consider us for the nonce, as a board of arbitrators, young men, and proceed non-provocatively. I appeal to both the parties in the interest of decency and culture.'

'I obey, sir. But they seem to be bent upon provocation,' said Sundaram. 'They were not unwittingly led into the trouble, nor was it a sudden impulse. It was, on the other hand, a cold-blooded and immoral bigamy of the worst order.'

'Immorality is on your side,' retorted Sarada, 'when you purchased the infection from the prostitute. But I am a virgin still.'

'Yes, vestal virgin!' murmured Sundaram.

'Do you deny your remarriage too ?' asked Mr Iyer.

'No, I don't.'

'But never in all history,' Sundaram began, 'has a wife dared to so insult her husband. Yet I do not complain. The sanctity and glory of our time-honoured institution of marriage have alone made India survive still, while Babylonia, Greece, and Rome have succumbed to the ravages of time. And there are Seetas, Savitris, Damayantis, and Anasuyas still to weigh against a thousand such bluestockings! But do you approve gentlemen,' and here he waxed eloquent, 'of these egotists' un-Indian ideals, whose natural end must be the strengthening of the chains by which our country has been bound, the thrusting it again into the intellectual bondage it hated, and the shutting out from it even the prospect of future freedom and happiness ?'

'I plead guilty, gentlemen,' I said, 'to the charge of abetment of bigamy, and am inviting the full penalty for it. I consider this as my act of public virtue for the restoration of truth.'

'Public virtue! Fiddlesticks!' exclaimed Sundaram.

'Can't you avoid the scandal, young man ?' appealed the toothless Law official.

'It is the truth, sir, and not a scandal,' retorted Sarada.

'As if you alone have a monopoly of it,' murmured Sundaram.

'We all appeal to you, madam, to reconsider your decision.' The old

lawyer pleaded again. 'It's not too late to contradict the press reports about the marriage.'

'What!' exclaimed Sarada, 'to contradict the truth? Impossible!'

'Look at these grayhaired parents whose hearts are choked with sorrow. Their silence must appeal to you more than all our arguments.'

'Has any father any right,' Sarada argued, 'to thrust upon his daughter conjugal life with a person whom she detested? Does my father deem his so-called honour more valuable than my health and happiness?'

'I never said it,' replied Mr Sarma.

'Thank you, father. Answer me, sir,' and she grew eloquent, 'am I to be the mother of his blind and sickly children who will curse me ever after for their existence? If laws and ideals are established to tyrannise over the unfortunate womanhood of India or to encourage acts of infidelity among her manhood, or to spread infection and disease among the hapless and innocent unborn—if that be the object of your laws—civil and moral—I have nothing more to say to this Varnasramite Law! I simply curse my Maker who gave me this sex and sent me here to be born in this thrice-wretched Hindu soil!'

'It has been alleged, sir,' Sundaram defended, 'on the slender evidence of a stray, uncurrent clinical record, that my physical constitution has been tainted. Is the sacred institution of marriage to be so lightly trampled underfoot because of the faintest possibility of a passing act of infidelity suggesting itself to a newly evolved product of a medical school?'

'What would you have done,' retorted Sarada, 'if I had committed this "*passing act of infidelity*" as you choose to call it?'

'You are a woman, girl, and I am a man.'

'Is man a licensed cock-in-a-poultry-farm, gentlemen? Aren't you ashamed of this man's base caricature of the manhood of India?'

'Even if the infection be proved,' explained the retired official, 'you are entitled but to a judicial separation, madam, and not to a re-marriage.'

'But widows remarry,' argued Sarada.

'Yes, but you are not one.'

'It's not my fault that he is alive.'

'Nor is it *mine*,' retorted Sundaram.

'Why didn't you die, man, to make way for him?' Mr Iyer's sarcasm fell flat.

'That means,' observed Sarada, 'punishing *me* for *his* crime against society!'

'Leaving him better qualified to commit a fresh crime!' I added.

'Begetting children is not the *sole* aim of marriage, madam,' remarked the old man.

'I had thought it was,' replied Sarada.

'Haven't you heard of companionate marriages—marriage without children, now popular in the West?' queried the reckless Mr Iyer.

'A cent per cent Sanatanist ideal, indeed!' I remarked. 'How old is your tenth child by your non-caste wife, sir?'

'In that case,' interrupted Sarada, 'women would rather marry women than men, sir.'

'Lady-doctors?' asked Sundaram mischievously.

'—may have a fancy for gentlemen idealists,' retorted Sarada, 'but no gentleman Barrister prefers professional prostitutes who forget that they are ladies!'

'The law is illogical, we admit, madam,' said the astute ancient of Law, changing his front. 'Nevertheless, it is in the statute-book.'

'That's why we defy it,' answered Sarada.

'What for?'

'To rouse the public conscience against its iniquity.'

'Will it be so easily roused?'

'After a dozen such defiances.'

'A century will elapse before the dozen is completed.'

'And ten centuries, if I don't begin it now.'

'But you wanted children?'

'Failing that, martyrdom is the second best, and is happier by far than either loneliness or companionate life with a tainted man.'

'Don't be swayed away in your decisions, sir,' interposed Sundaram, 'by any spirit of chivalry. Here is a man who has ruined me, broken up my family life and come as an armed adversary face to face with me. There he stands—an opposing enemy in battle in the open day light—he who made a harlot of my wife. As heaven is your Judge, if one-tenth of what he had done me had been done to you, you would have shot him dead on the spot. But the ruins of my inborn humanitarian impulse prompted me to spare his life!'

'No, it's your guilty conscience that made a coward of you,' I retorted.

'I would rather be a coward than an irresponsible ego-maniac seducing impulsive married women away from their husbands!'

'Convince them, Mr Sarma,' the retired Law Member sank back in his chair, exhausted.

'How can I,' indignantly burst out the Collector, 'when our laws are as irrational as this England-returned phil——man's demand here? Well, no more beating about the bush! How much does he want as compensation?'

The old fox cast a glance at the lean-eyed vulture who transmitted it at once to the bandicoot of the Inner Temple, who in turn, nodded back a pre-arranged semaphore dot.

'Fifteen thousand,' announced Mr Iyer.

'What?' enquired Sarada.

'Demands so much for our freedom,' I explained.

'We never solicited it,' said Sarada.

'Nor was the sum demanded of you?' replied Mr Iyer.

'What is that money for?' I asked.

'To buy a new wife, of course!' laughed the old Advocate.

'And to lose her too?' observed Sarada.

'Never!' protested Mr Iyer. 'Such follies are exceptional among Indian girls. The average girl is clever enough to bear healthy children, too.'

'Shut up, you slanderer of Indian womanhood! Your own daughter will shoot you down for that remark.' Sarada's eyes emitted fire as she spoke.

'Will he be satisfied with five thousand?' bargained Mr Sarma.

'Not a pie shall you pay, father!' protested Sarada. 'Look at that man's shameless advocacy of unchastity! On my bended knees I pray you, not to pay for the ruin of another unknown girl, too!'

'If I don't pay, you will be imprisoned, and this Vakil too will throw his daughter away on him.'

'I am prepared for worse consequences. But believe me, father, Kamala is not of this man's stuff.'

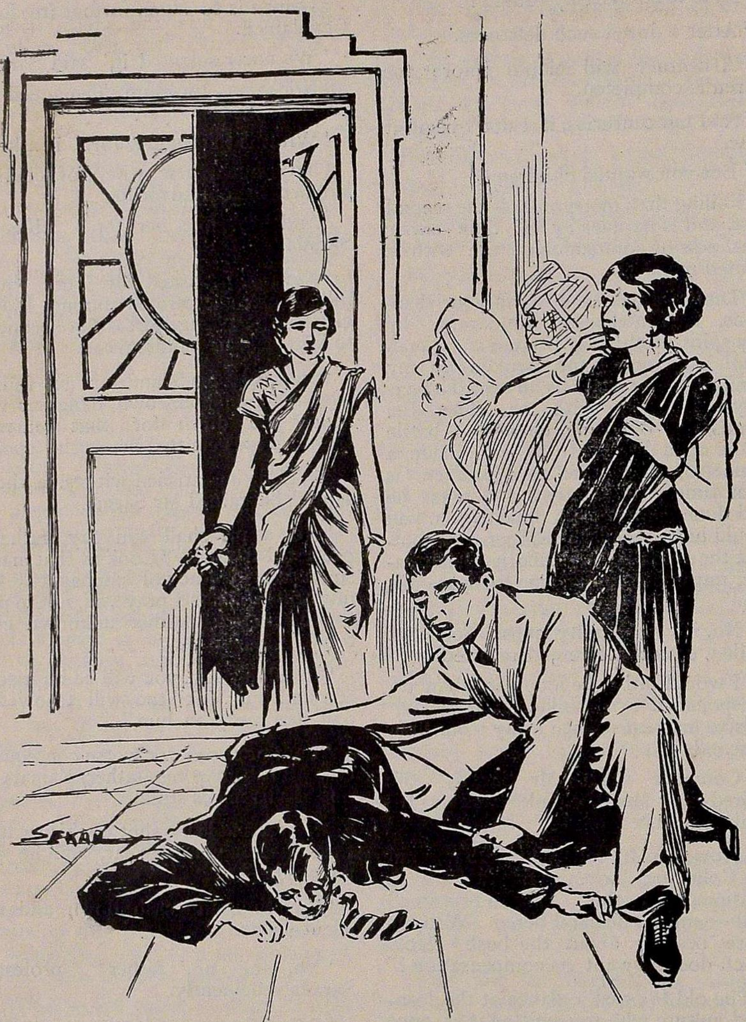
Mr Iyer suddenly shot a whisper into the old Law Member's ear, and he announced:—

'Five thousand cash down and my client yields.'

'No, no, no, father!' protested Sarada vehemently.

'Off with you, girl!' Mr Sarma brushed her aside. 'I am the parent of an only child. I am not concerned with other girls. Sign the agreement, gentlemen!'

'How many such purchases will you make?' I asked.



The next moment a revolver shot was heard and with a loud groan Sundaram fell.

'As many as there are dreamers of your ilk !'

'If I committed suicide now ?' asked Sarada.

'No use. You cannot prevent his being convicted nor the other man's ruining the unknown girl.'

'Is this the result, after all, of our defiance of Law and Convention ? Oh !' Sarada leaned her head on my shoulder in despair and began to weep.

The next moment a revolver shot was heard, and with a loud groan Sundaram fell. I ran up to his aid, when every eye was turned to the door. It opened wide revealing the stolid form of Kamala—revolver in hand.

'You ?!!!' roared Mr Iyer and ran up to her.

'Stand back !' she commanded and he stopped abruptly.

Sundaram's death was instantaneous. There was a deep silence. Nobody stirred. It was the police serjeant who appeared at the door broke the spell by demanding :—

'Who shot him, gentlemen ?'

'He—he—' blurted out Mr Iyer pointing at me.

Kamala leapt forward shouting at the top of her voice, 'No, I shot him.'

'Is he dead ?' asked the serjeant.

'Yes,' said I.

'Who is that woman ?' asked the panicked old Law Member.

'I am Daughter India, sir. And this is her first bullet into the heart of your rotten Hindu Law !'

'You are under arrest.' The serjeant caught her by the forearm.

She meekly parted with the weapon and followed him.

[This story completes the series planned by Mr Aundy. Its conclusion is rather overwhelming : the Hindu widow Kamala suddenly developing into a crackswoman of the Chicago underworld. Every writer is entitled to express through his story opinions on the various problems of life and suggest solutions. The responsibility is the writer's.

[Ed.—*S. S.*]

RAGHU, INFALLIBLE PALMIST

By N. RAMABHADRAN

IT has not been given to the many to have their fortunes foretold by a capable, omnipotent, unerring palmist, and should any possess that curiosity to know the future, he should have no hesitation to call in Raghu, the reputed palmist who had established already a record for prognosticating the world events such as earthquakes, wars, fasts, shipwrecks, and a thousand little inexplicables that go to contribute to the miseries of the world. His catalogue of forecasts did not end with telling evil news on the weary world. Raghu, or Rahu, as he is sometimes called amongst his immediate circle of friends and patrons, is a man of no mean ability. His catalogue of achievements would fill the advertisement columns of any newspaper to about a thousand pages, and the opinions expressed about his capacities translated in terms of Royal personages would include the crowned heads of all India, part of Africa, and the dictators and Presidents of all the known Republics of the world.

Raghu made his mark before the august assemblage at Genoa. It was he that predicted that India will join the League to relieve the Imperial burden. It was he again that proclaimed that Japan and China would never agree, and that the Disarmament Conference would earn for Hendersen the Nobel Prize for peace. While statesmen and politicians were engaged in discussions about the future of the world, our Raghu had been taking the impressions with autographs of the palms of all the people that visited that wonderful place in order to publish in book form, on the lines of the celebrated Cheiro, the life readings of those who were of any consequence in this world of ours.

Raghu is now plying his trade unostentatiously, and you will ask me why, if he had exhausted the foretelling of all the people he should still be hovering about to foretell the future demanding fees, and thrust his unwelcome presence on those to whom the future had nothing to give, or no prospects to offer. You may even ask me as to why I am parading the virtues of Raghu as a celebrated palmist and may even doubt if I am not driving the thin end of the wedge and proclaim him as the avatar who with a look at the palm throw your future like an open book for my own private gratification. The motives of Raghu, and my extollings do not bear comparison.

Raghu came in my way as old good things come in our way in the most unexpected and unorthodox fashion. I was reclining on my sofa musing over this pessimistic world and was wondering as to why King Alexander should be carried away by an assassin while his namesake centuries ago thrilled the world with his conquests, as to why one should be selected to suffer all the miseries the world could offer while his lesser compeers were enjoying the fruits of the labours of others, as to why this unkind world should make invidious distinctions between one man and another while laws proclaimed from the house-tops that all men were equal in the eyes of law, and as to why Raghu alone should be going about amassing money, when Raghu himself stepped in and arrested the flow of unholy thoughts.

Earlier in the day his lesser compeer, the street gipsy, ran along the street bawling out 'good news are coming, good letters are expected.' Neither good letter came nor even any good news. It was the refined Raghu that came to claim a portion of the hard earned cash saying good things in the most amiable manner, and instilling hopes where none existed.

Raghu seated himself comfortably in front of me without a word of apology,

and without even getting the formality of a permission to sit, just as the arrogant self-reliant non-gazetted officer who was called in for a consultation by a Gazetted. He took it for granted that he was the most important person, and if he had only wished he would foretell such nasty things as would make your hair stand on end. He opened his album, and out came a whole array of black impressions of the palms of ministers, murderers, philosophers, poets, potentates, professors, and princes, thieves and people of all sorts ; and most of them had paid encomiums on his art.

Raghu volunteered to predict my future without fees, and asked me to show my palms to him. I did so, eager to find out some loophole to drive away my pessimism which was besetting me earlier in the day.

'I believe, if your lines are as represented in your hand, you have a future, a great future,' exclaimed Raghu with a staggering wonder.

'Are you sure that it is my hand that you are surveying ?' I asked with some bewilderment.

'I am neither a fraud nor a charlatan. When I say that something is going to happen, it just happens and nothing more, nothing less. In all predictions, the subject should have a faith, and an implicit faith in all that is said or spoken. I have given predictions to many. Some stoutly denied the past, and doubted the future, but had to admit when later I visited them, that they were wrong and I was right.'

I had a misgiving that if I talked more he would read me and adjust his future to the disclosures I would be making to him.

'Your palms are similar to those of His Late Majesty King Edward the Seventh, and as I said before, you have a great future. Whatever good fortune awaited him awaits you too.'

I had studied the reign of King Edward the Seventh, and even wrote a thesis on his reign for submission to a historical Academy. But, I did not think it worth while to be a King with all the duties and implications of the onerous office.

'I mean the luck, and not the person,' hastened the palmist noticing my misgivings. 'We, palmists, talk of the unknown in terms of the known.'

Here was Raghu saying something good which was wanted very badly at the moment. I asked him if he would give me my life-history—past, present, and future, for my vanity was tickled and his prognostications infectious. Raghu had now got the upperhand.

He took out his lens from out of the pocket of his capacious inner coat, surveyed my palms from all possible angles, and with a grunt asked me if I was not married, had children, some property, endowed with a good education, a bad start, a good present, and a glorious future.

'A description such as that would fit anyone in the world, and it is not anywhere near the life of the august personage you mentioned just now,' said I suspiciously.

'Our palms are the index of our minds. Do you mean to say that all are educated, and all are married ? If you throw me in the wrong scent, I may go wrong. Please verify what I said and correct me when I am in the wrong,' replied my self-confident palmist.

'The facts are as you represent,' said I, fearing to contradict the palmist who had read the palms of ministers, members of the executive, millionaires, mill-owners, and murderers.

Raghu need not be told twice. He spoke of the pitfalls I was subjected to, to the three accidents from which I escaped like Lord Clive being destined by God for something great, to the enemies I had, to the skilful way with which I manipulated them, to the good fortune that awaited me but did not come owing to the perfidy of some false friend, to the enemies that worked my downfall consequent on the age-line coming into conflict directly with the line of the heart, to the successful

turning down of their nefarious plots chiefly through the instrumentality of the circles and the whorls that were in abundance on the tips of my fingers, and to the immense future that awaited me consequent on the black paits on the lines fadings off as fog before sunshine.

Dear readers, I was gloriously depicted, and the hard-earned money flowed from my hand to his palm. The palmist produced the psychological effect which was too irresistible to be shaken.

Once again, dear readers, if ever you are despondent, call for Raghu. If ever you want the future to be told in advance, call for Raghu. If ever you have small cash and feel you will be losing, call for Raghu. If ever you have ambition to soar high, call for Raghu. If ever you want to elevate yourself from the rut of common life, wire for Raghu. If ever you want to be His Majesty even though it were for the spell of a brief hour, phone for Raghu. But, please do not send money to those advertisers who solve six of your difficulties for a rupee, or post a life-reading for a V.P.P. for Rs. 10, free of postage, or the details of your life for Rs. 25 with prospects of the money being returned if predictions prove false. For if you take to them you would only get what Raghu had already told me in confidence, and what he would tell you if ever he happens to walk into your parlour as he once walked into mine.

Raghu may go to you some day when you are despondent, and give you fresh hopes. The events predicted by him may happen or may not happen. He may predict life like the Delphic Oracle; but, please do not be carried away by the enthusiasm of his art and loose your hard-earned cash on the promise of a bright future. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush ; and should Raghu show you the testimonial which I gave him, do not entirely believe it, but refer the matter urgently to me.

Forget the past, *Live* the present, and the *Future* is assuredly before you like the open book defying even the forebodings, and foretellings of the omniscient Raghu.

Believe—and our whole argument breaks up.
Enthusiasm's the best thing, I repeat ;
Only, we can't command it ; fire and life
Are all, dead matter's nothing, we agree :
And be it a mad dream or God's very breath,
The fact's the same,—belief's fire once in us,
Makes of all else mere stuff to show itself.
We penetrate our life with such a glow
As fire lends wood and iron—this turns steel,
That burns to ash—all's one, fire proves its power
For good or ill, since men call flare sncccess.

BROWNING

(Bishop Blougram's Apology)

'Would you mind accompanying me to my carriage?' she asked

THE EXTINGUISHED CANDLE

By RAJENDRA PRASAD SAKSENA

POVERTY, women, and children—these three things I have always been most afraid of. But, the farther I try to run away from them, the faster they pursue me. Of poverty I shall not speak here, for its mention is tabooed in decent society. Of children too I would not say anything, for you can always cast them off, though in so doing you might be incurring the life-long displeasure of the fond parents. But that does not matter at all so long as you can free yourself. Of women—they are a different stuff altogether and the most formidable too, for, they stick. They form a web around you; the more you try to get out of them the more entangled you find yourself.

It is the first day of the new year and one of the letters that I have received takes me full ten years back. During that time I had just started my career

as a journalist. What a life, that of a journalist! Incessant work, tremendous responsibilities, exposure to many risks—and all this for a meagre remuneration—too meagre indeed to keep body and soul together in a decent way.

It was on a winter afternoon that one of my more fortunate colleagues told me that he could spare me an invitation at a big dinner of the highs and mighties of the society of that place. Not having enjoyed a full meal for many days, my mouth began to water at the prospect of a hearty dinner. But presently I shuddered, thinking of detection, noticing my only threadbare suit. The temptation of dainty dishes was, however, too great for me to resist at that time.

With a fast beating heart I entered the premises where the dinner was to be held, handed my card, and was ushered in. I chose the darkest corner to sit in. During the first few courses I was too busy helping myself to notice anything that went around me. But when I did look up I became nervous for a moment to see that every eye was turned towards me. I noticed that amongst my adjacent neighbours was one journalist who greeted me when I looked at him. On my right, was a lady. Then it was that I began to feel easy within me for the gazes that I had suspected to be directed towards me were in reality devoted to this fair neighbour of mine.

Such attention was being bestowed on her by everybody that in mediæval times she would have been taken for the Queen of Beauty amongst her devotees. But she was haughty as ever and replied even to the highest among those assembled with monosyllables or with crushing indifference. The most awkward situation arose when she gave a curt No to a gentleman who proposed to take her in his car and drop her at her place. Now the gentleman was held in very high esteem by all and it was a sight to see his discomfiture and her indifference.

I heaved a sigh of relief when I found myself in the open space between the dining hall and the exit of the premises and was walking rather leisurely when a voice from behind asked me: 'Would you mind accompanying me to my carriage?' In it I recognized the melodious voice, whose haughtiest tunes only I had occasion to hear in the hall. I expressed to her my great pleasure in accepting the offer. Indeed, I must admit, I was pleased. But my pleasure was not so much in enjoying her company as in seeing people around me jealous of me. We talked of very formal things and before I could find out who she was, she drove away. I repaired to my lonely bed and the soothing thoughts of the triumphant evening lulled me to sleep.

A fortnight passed and she became only a girl of my imagination, when I received a letter from her. It enquired about my health and the cause of my silence—as if I knew her address and as if it would have been a matter of course for me to write to her! In reply I told her about myself, my profession, and so on. Subsequently, each time that I wrote a letter in reply to her I promised to myself that it would be my last as I could hardly afford unnecessary stationary and postage. But somehow everytime I did reply.

Once she asked me to come to a certain restaurant to see her. I definitely settled within myself not to go, but the appointed hour found me uncomfortably treading the pavilion of the restaurant. When I was becoming quite sure that she would not come, she did appear with a 'Sorry to be so late!' in her most cheerful tones. We gossiped over a cup of tea and light refreshments. Then she flitted away saying a brilliant 'I must be moving now, Cheerio!' I was in a fix. I had hardly sufficient money with me to pay for the tea, and what of the dozen other things? I calculated mentally what I could get by pawning some books or borrowing some money on an article which I had written. But how could I get out at that time was a problem. I took up courage and asked the waiter to bring up the bill, signed it most nonchalantly

and tipped the waiter. To my surprise he departed with a salaam and so did I and at a much faster pace.

I came back home and vowed never to have anything to do with the butterfly with her most inexplicable ways.

A long time passed with two letters from her and no response from me. It was on a dark night—as dark as my future—when I was tossing about my bed that I was surprised by a gentle knock on the door of my room. I opened it in wonder and who was there but the girl of my dreams!

'I thought you were ill. You did not respond to my letters and I just dropped in to look you up.'

I looked at her in the glimmering light of the small candle burning on the window sill. I felt for the first and the last time that she was beautiful—her eyes so bright—her lips so red—her features so perfect. I had hardly contemplated the whole situation when a gust of wind blew through the room and extinguished the candle . . .

*

It was a few days after that I received a hurried epistle from her. She informed me that she was soon to be married to an officer, a long long distance off, and that she would be going away. She recognised that I would be very sorry indeed to lose her but we had to bow down to the inevitable.

On the following New Year's Day I received a letter with identical regrets and emphasis on her belief that I would be miserable without her and an advice to draw consolation from the maxim: What cannot be cured must be endured. I did not reply. Since that time all these ten years I have always been receiving a letter from her on the New Year's Day evincing the same solicitude on my behalf and feeling concern for my misery because of her. As if I care a hang for her now!

*

A queer man indeed was Krishna! I gave him a lift when I so much snubbed everybody else at that party.

Then again in his letters he would not speak of anything else but journalism and his articles. As if I cared at all for journalism! Now he is too much heart-broken to respond to my New Year's wishes. Even on so much encouragement from me he could not be brought to express himself.

Then, at the restaurant, the same topic again—of a speech by this man and a courtier speech by that. I am sure he was shy.

Of that night—but let me not think of it!

I know he would be so sorry and miserable because of me, but how could I help it? He was *so* impossible!

VENKADU, THE HARIJAN

By M. G. SOMAYAJULU

NOT one of you, dear readers, would regard Venkadu as belonging to the galaxy of romantic and embellished names that all of you are so familar with. Romantic or not, Venkadu is the name of a tall, well-developed, tolerably good-looking harijan youth who was in the fifth form of the local high-school in Vizagapatam.

Denied education, culture, and the common decencies of life, condemned to the lowliest situation in life for ages partly by the caste-ridden, religion-blinded, fortune-favoured Hindus, the parents of Venkadu took full advantage of the long-delayed, Gandhi-initiated Harijan Emanicipation Movement. Many were the fervent prayers solemnly uttered by the parents of Venkadu and his tribe, when they realised that at long last silver linings had begun to appear in the cloud of their wretched condition.

As a boy, while gazing at the young care-free lads jovially going to and coming out of the schools, Venkadu used to meditate whether it would ever fall to his lot to be able to go to schools and study and acquire knowledge. His sombre musings always resulted in a despairing conviction that it would never, never be possible for him to realise his ambition. Would a fish ever hope to fly in the air ?

Venkadu was therefore the first harijan of Vizagapatam who successfully applied for one of the scholorships that were offered by the Harijan Seva Sangh. The fact of his coming up to the fifth form shows that it was not ill-bestowed.

Like a hungry lion rapidly devouring a lamb that chances to come its way, Venkadu set to his studies with a fierce eagerness. An insatiable love for learning became his dominant passion. Breaking from the bounds of his narrow curriculum, he acquired wide general knowledge by reading classical authors on diverse subjects.

To Venkadu's immense delight, he was not subjected to any insulting treatment at least in the school. Ever accustomed to the harsh and haughty bellowings of 'clear out of the way, you untouchable dog' from the lips of orthodox brahmins in his young days, Venkadu was thrilled when he received courteous words and experienced decent deeds. Cleanliness not being the monopoly of any class, Venkadu was not inferior in that respect to any of his class-fellows.

Humanised by friendly intercourse with fellow beings, refined by constant contact with literature, Venkadu developed into a fine specimen of humanity.

In his younger days a big puzzle used to haunt Venkadu. The glaring contrast between the condition of his people whose life was one of unrelieved degradation, and the life of the rest of the society which looked to him to be all sunshine, suggested a grand puzzle to his impressionable mind. But where could he discover the why of it ? The invariable answer that he got from his parents, if ever he chose to take his puzzle to them for solution, was the inevitable answer of all wretched people : Karma. A continuous life in such a state seemed to have blinded the depressed classes to the obvious and preventible injustice being done to them by the caste-people. All the little doubts and puzzles that vainly raised their heads in the boy's brain, were finding their answers in the maturer knowledge of the schoolboy, Venkadu.

Thus, while his school-fellows were having a merry time in their reckless, youngish way, Venkadu's brain was the hot-bed of all sorts of ideas and enquiries, regrets and longings, hopes and fears. A settled serious look in the shining eyes, a broad meditative brow were the result. Every fine piece of

literature that transported him to realms of joy used to bring with it the poignant consciousness that most of his sect were denied those raptures. It was at such times that he would regard Mahatma Gandhi as the saviour of his people.

II

It was a summer noon and the sun was shining with reckless radiance. At such a time Venkadu and his parents were going on a journey to a neighbouring village in a country bullock-cart. The road was rough and a hot wind was blowing. There were very few trees to give a hospitable shade. The path was deserted save for the presence of one lonely pedestrian trudging along with great difficulty, with bare feet and a bare head. This solitary pedestrian was a brahmin whose orthodoxy was proclaimed by the cut of his hair and the thick paint of sandalwood paste on his forehead, dripping in sweat-drops on account of the heat. A small cloth-bundle was hanging on his back and his bloated stomach indicated that he had had a sumptuous meal.

The Brahmin was, indeed, in a distressful situation. He was finding his journey intolerable and he was beginning to feel thirsty. As his thirst was increasing his energy was decreasing. Every step required an effort. But, ah, if only the horrible thirst would not trouble him! It was water that he wanted immediately. But where was water to be found in that desolate spot? Not a house was in sight. Eying keenly around he espied a well a few yards from the road, probably dug by some unknown philanthropist. He had hardly the strength even to walk those few yards; yet urged by compelling necessity he dragged his feet towards the well. But before he had covered half the distance, weakness overcame him and he fell into a swoon for want of water in the very sight of water.

The bullock-cart carrying Venkadu and his parents reached that identical spot a few moments later. Seeing a prostrate figure by the roadside, they got down from their cart to enquire what the matter was. They took a few strides towards the fallen person when all at once they stopped. The discovery that he was a brahmin instinctively intercepted their progress. Such is the force of habit! Dreading to go near a brahmin, yet unwilling to forsake one in distress, the old people stood rooted to the spot in disconcerting indecision.

Strangely enough, no such inhibition disturbed Venkadu. Conscious only of one feeling that a human being was in distress needing succour, he rushed to the prostrate figure, to the utter consternation of his parents. Their cries of protest were unheard by him. A glance at the figure revealed to him that the Brahmin was alive but unconscious. Quickly he ran to the well and as quickly returned with a bucket full of freshwater. Sprinkling some drops on the brow, he forced greater drops into the parched throat. A slow gulp and a slight quiver of the eyelids rewarded his efforts. He repeated the operation until at last the closed eyelids opened in a vague uncomprehending stare.

When once the danger was past Venkadu awoke to a full understanding of what he had done. It was then and not till then that the distincton, that he was a harijan and the other a brahmin, dawned upon him. When he acted he acted like an automaton, a machine. He saw trouble and wanted to relieve it. It was like a reflex action. When the Brahmin was once again conscious and out of danger, Venkadu realised what an unbelievable thing he had done in a fit of generous humanity. He, a harijan, adminstered, yes, actually, with his own hands, adminstered water to a brahmin. Could he be dreaming? No, the reality was too sordid to allow of any such doubt. His eyes slowly wandered to where his parents were and the pitiful sight of their helpless aloofness at such a time of need emphasised the full pathos of the situation. But for Venkadu's providential presence, the Brahmin, assuredly, would have left this world,

for Venkadu's parents would not have moved an inch nearer even though they heard the death groans of the Brahmin, not out of malice but out of sheer fear of approaching and polluting a brahmin.

Venkadu rapidly turned things over in his mind. There was nothing in his appearance that would betray his caste. Should he then depart without revealing his caste as though he were running away from some frightful crime that he had committed? 'Shameful cowardice,' his conscience cried, and Venkadu agreed with his conscience. He boldly decided to reveal his caste and watch for developments.

It was a clouded sun that shone when the Brahmin completely regained consciousness. Consequently the heat was subdued. The Brahmin gulped some more water, and his thirst quenched he sat drying his face with the end of his uppercloth.

Venkadu stood beside him, calm, erect, and dignified.

'You have saved my life, my young friend,' said the Brahmin in grateful tones as soon as he saw Venkadu. 'I am, indeed very grateful to you.'

'Hardly any gratitude is necessary, sir,' replied Venkadu. 'What I have done is very common and no man can do less. Do you feel quite fit again?'

'Quite,' responded the Brahmin. 'I am much refreshed. God is great and He has sent you to help an innocent brahmin.'

The name of God pronounced so glibly, stung Venkadu to the quick. The words 'inncocent brahmin' rang in his ears in a tone of hideous mockery. Innocent indeed! A tiger, thought Venkadu, which preys on helpless lambs is innocent, because it obeys an instinct of hunger and does not justify its conduct by quoting sacred texts. But no, not the brahmin, who quotes God Himself for contravening His provisions. The complete recovery of the Brahmin braced Venkadu to a debate with him.

'Oh Brahmin,' declaimed Venkadu, 'why do you utter the name of God in vain, when in your daily life you transgress his commands. Are you an innocent brahmin? Is any brahmin innocent?'

'Why, what do you know against me?' rejoined the Brahmin, taken aback by this unexpected vehemence. 'Why am I not innocent? What have I done?'

'Rather what have you not done?' replied Venkadu in the same militant tone. Then growing a little milder he added, 'Do you believe in God and that in His eyes all his children are equal?'

'What a question to be addressed to an orthodox brahmin like myself!' sneeringly replied the brahmin. 'Most certainly I do believe in God. Not a day passes without my offering prayers to Him and I do not touch a morsel of food without first dedicating it to Him.'

'How then can you dub one section of His creatures as untouchables and unapproachables?' demanded Venkadu in another fit of emotion. 'Why then do you condemn the depressed classes to dirty hovels and wretched life denying them the most elementary amenities of life? Does not the same kind of blood flow through their veins? If anything their blood is made richer by honest toil.'

'My young friend,' said the Brahmin in a conciliatory voice that indicated that he knew all, 'now I see your point. But what can we poor mortals do to relieve the situation? We are not free agents. We must bow to the invincible Dharma Sastras.'

The last word was enough to pour oil on a glowing blaze.

'Dharma Sastras be blowed,' bellowed Venkadu. 'There are things greater than Sastras and they are justice and humanity. Do not make Sastras an excuse for crude superstition and gross inhumanity. Does it interest you, Brahmin, to learn that I am an un-

touchable ? Just now you drank water from the very hands of an untouchable. Yet the heavens have not come down nor has the world been destroyed by a deluge. Instead, a life is saved. Look at my parents standing yonder, like painted pictures, afraid to come near because you are a brahmin. I am sorry I have spoken strongly but I felt strongly. I mean no ill-will to you personally, but I condemn the wretched prejudice of which you are all victims. You have completely recovered now and you need no further help. Good-bye.'

Venkadu led his parents back to the bullock-cart and resumed his journey.

But what about the Brahmin ? He was at first stunned by the discovery that he had drunk water from the hands of an untouchable. He was speechless and his first emotion was anger as he supposed that the untouchable had wantonly polluted him. In the next instant he was overpowered with shame for harbouring such a mean thought about the person who actually saved his life, When he was on his way to death, the harijan youth brought him back to life and what a demeanour he had ! Could such a frank fellow ever be guilty of such a low trick ? 'No, never,' answered the Brahmin. 'Can that youth be right after all ? Is there another side to the picture ? Is his piety an injustice ? He has not consciously willed injustice and inhumanity. He has blindly obeyed the Sastras. Yet injustice is the undesirable result. Or can it be that the Sastras really do not sanction such a barbarous conduct and that it is only a mistaken interpretation of the Sastras ? Even if the Sastras have really enjoined such a distinction of untouchablity, is not that youth right in asserting that there are things greater than Sastras and they are justice and humanity ?'

Such were the thoughts that swarmed in the head of the Brahmin as he was continuing his journey.

At one moment he would assert dogmatically that the Sastras said so and it was not for him to care for the consequences. The next moment he would pathetically observe, 'No, it cannot be.' All the way the Brahmin was hotly debating within himself. The incident that just eccurred seemed to him like an earthquake. It unsettled everything in his brain. Nothing was stable there at that moment. Gradually the brain storm began to cease and the Brahmin was regaining his balance of mind.

As he reached his destination he exclaimed, 'Whatever be the cause, this untouchability business is too monstrous. It cannot go on. My God! It must be smashed.'

A strange light of grim determination illuminated his face.

— Anti-untouchability propagandist

If you prick us, do we not bled ? if you tickle us, do we not laugh ? if you poison us, do we not die ?

SHAKESPEARE
(*The Merchant of Venice*)

UNMASKED

By SCHWARTZ PONRATNAM

A YOUNG man, a little over twenty years of age, with clean-shaven face, dark, angry eyes, and lips that spoke of boasting, sat idly at a desk in one of the class-rooms of the Boys' High School. At the other end of the desk, a good-looking lad of sixteen, but just now with a down-cast expression on his face, leant in a posture that aided his self-control over an anger that often tried to express itself in terms of both words and action.

Both were in that room, in order to escape the heat of the midday sun, which, had they been in any other room, would have tried their patience to the utmost. Save for the twittering of some sparrows, there was, for some moments, no sound or movement in the room; then, the younger of the two, Swaminath, speaking in an angry tone, revived the bitter conversation they had stopped for a while.

'Well, Valen,' he said, 'if you choose to put it that way, I tell you, it won't do at all. I am tired of your advice, and your charges are utterly false. Hasty judgment is seldom correct, and if you go on as you have been doing, one day or other, you will be nicely paid out for it—if not by me, by some other. It is not fair on your part—your reprimands are more than you can expect me to bear. And look how you've taunted me recently—mocking me and teasing me for nothing! You have no sense of fairness, you haven't the brain to see the possible consequences of your actions—and I am not going to stand it any longer; and so, though you are my elder, I tell you plainly, be careful now in what you say, lest—'

'But, Swaminath,' broke in Valen, in his cutting voice, 'you're in my care. What answer will satisfy your parents, who entrusted you to me? How shall I, being a Prefect, be able to satisfy the boarding authorities? In any case, I cannot dream of having a young boy of sixteen running after girls, flirting—'

'Be careful, I say,' cried Swaminath, 'or you will feel the consequences painful indeed!'

'Oh, do you think I am blind and deaf? It is no good your trying to hide your fault. I can prove everything. Did not you talk with a girl on Wednesday evening by the banyan tree? I tell you, I know!'

'But even if I did, I said nothing that I ought not to have said. She is my cousin sister—everybody knows that. And even were she my love, what is the wrong in that? This much I am sure of—my sixteen years' knowledge tells me so much—love is a very pleasant thing, arising from the heart. But I tell you again, she is nothing more to me than my sister—and our meeting, too, was accidental.'

'Oh, stop that nonsense! It is unpleasant to hear. Now, listen! Love won't do you any good; boys of your age must not fall in love. Much water must pass under the bridge before you can think of marriage. Break off from now. I am against these so-called love-marriages; they are nothing but a disguised form of lust. Was there such a practice in our forefathers' times? No! Therefore leave these evil tendencies, lest evil days befall you. That is my warning—let it be my last one!'

Valen's hoarse, unpleasant voice was replaced by Swaminath's sweet one, which, although now agitated, was still under control, 'I once again remind you,' said the youth, 'she is as my sister to me. Don't jump to conclusions!'

'How long you're going to act with her the part of brother and sister, I am not concerned to know. It is clear to

me that the matter must stop. Why, you speak as if you were a sage, as one for whom the pleasures of the world have no attraction! Saintly pretensions, eh ?'

At that, Swaminath could not control his rage. 'I know you, man,' he blurted out, 'know more of your ways than you think! For your own good, leave the room; go!'

There was silence for a few moments, and then Valen rose, and left the room.

Left alone, Swaminath sat, with head thrown back, recalling his taunter's words. He, Swaminath, had never liked telling lies; in fact, a characteristic of his was such outspokenness, that he would tell almost anyone things that might be told and things that ought not to be told. It was the force of this characteristic, this straightforward frankness of his that now caused him a little grief.

Valen had always carried along with him an air of piety, and that and his boasting lips deceived the unwary. With many in the town, he was an ideal; but the little and insignificant fellows of the school knew him for one of silly mannerisms, and one who was always finding fault with them.

Swaminath now recalled all this. How many were the troubles, he reflected, brought by this fellow upon boys of his, Swaminath's age. How, he wondered, could such a state of affairs be set right?

With this question in his mind, he glanced out at the open; it was now past noon, but the rays of the sun were still blazing down.

Again his mind turned to the boaster's words. Indeed, Valen was wrong there; the girl *was* his cousin sister, and what he had said about his talk with her was quite true.

He was still thinking over the whole matter, when his thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of a peon with a letter. 'Mr Valen?' asked the peon. And with that, a plan flashed into Swaminath's brain. 'Yes, I am he,' he answered. And with the letter in his hand, and the peon leaving the room again, his heart rang to the thoughts of triumph and—*revenge!*

He already knew that Valen corresponded with a lady, and this letter he held in his hand, this letter, come into his possession by a fortunate accident was, he felt sure, from her. Yes, he felt sure of it! Why, the very handwriting on the envelope confirmed that the letter was from a lady! And he gave a quick, unreal laugh.

Overjoyed at his luck, and at the prospects of revenge, his heart was beating rapidly, and as he started to open the letter his band was a little shaky. He must be careful, he told himself—yes, he knew that! And so very slowly and very carefully, he proceeded to loosen the flap of the envelope, and as the flap had not been too well gummed, he accomplished this fairly easily. And then—there lay the letter in his hand! The writing was in a girlish hand. And then, perusing it, he was assured there had been previous correspondence!

As carefully as he had raised the flap, he pasted it down again.

And now, whether his actions right or wrong, he must carefully consider what next to do; how best to use the knowledge he had gained of this private matter. And again he heard in his mind the melody of revenge. But then, for a few moments, he felt only anger, for there came to him, one after another, the past deceits of 'that cunning fellow! And, gritting his teeth, he dealt the desk a violent blow with his fist. But his anger passed, and he laughed as he thought of the means of vengeance he possessed against the evil-faced fellow who had presumed to speak to him, Swaminath, about his cousin sister!

He was pacing the room when Valen, still with an angry expression in his dark eyes, re-entered. He handed him the letter, and smiled to himself as he saw the Prefect hurry to the other end of the room, opened the en-

velope and started poring over the contents.

'May I know from whom it is, Valen?' asked Swaminath after a moment or two.

'Oh, it is from my sister at Cuddalore,' replied Valen.

'I see. Nothing of importance?'

'Don't bother me while I'm reading, you impudent rascal. It's no business of yours.'

Since it was Saturday, every boy at the High School was allowed to go to town, and so three o'clock that afternoon found Swaminath walking, with long strides along the lane that led from the school to the town, intending to call on a Mr Chellan, a friend of of his, and who, he knew, sympathized with him and the other boys in regard to Valen.

He received a hearty welcome from his friend, and then, unable to keep to himself any longer the matter that filled his mind to the exclusion of everything else, he poured out in a torrent of words, a full account of all that had happened—the scence with Valen in the class-room, the arrival of the letter, his own very wrong action in opening the letter and reading it, and, finally, the great hopes he had since had of taking revenge on his taunter.

His friend listened to all he had to say, and then, after thinking for a few moments, said, 'Well, if you are really prepared for a little adventure, I think I see a way of your being able to avenge yourself on that fellow. You must manage by some means to obtain entrance into the box-room to-night, and then, with a bunch of keys which I will give you, you must try to open Valen's box. That done, you can take what you want—there will probably be more than one letter from the lady and so be able to show this fellow up completely. If, after you have helped yourself, you will come to me, I shall have something for you that will help you to do this. So after taking what you want, remember to relock the box, and then make your way as quickly as you can to me. I shall be waitting for you at the School chapel. —Now, there will be a little risk for you in all this; so I will send my man, Arthur, with you. He will be a guard for you, and, too, may be able to help you.'

Swaminath was delighted with his friend's plan, and readily undertook to carry out his own part in it; and after arranging when and where he was to meet Arthur that night, he returned to the School in the highest spirits.

As he went along, he thought out what he would take when he had managed to open Valen's box with the aid of that bunch of keys that now reposed in his pocket; and he decided that there would be no great point in taking either the letter from the lady which he had already seen, or any other letter from her that he might find in the box. The thing to do, was to get Valen's reply. And that Valen would reply that very evening, he felt sure; and he also felt confident that Valen would then go to the box-room and deposit the letter for the night in his private box for, as he, now remembered, that was just what Valen had done on previous occasions when he had received a letter.

It drew towards midnight, and every-one in the School was asleep except two persons. In the class-room, by the light of a candle, Valen was busy writing with his fountain pen, and from a convenient hiding-place, Swaminath was watching him. And the latter did his watching all the more confidently in that he had at his side, his friend's man, Arthur.

Valen finished his letter, and the clock struck twelve when he put it into an envelope.

Then, unconscious of the two who were following him—and here the man, Arthur, more than proved his worth, for he not only set Swaminath an example in correct tracking, but also acted as a curb on the latter's excitement and impetuosity, which might have ruined matters—Valen made his way

to the box-room. It was by virtue of his being a Prefect that he had access to the key of it.

The door reached, he unlocked it, and entering, crossed straight to his own box, and as he did so, the two others slipped in, and hid themselves behind the piles of other boxes that stood around.

A few breathless moments passed, and then Valen could be heard relocking the door behind him, and that was followed by the faint sound of his retreating footsteps down the corridor.

The longed-for moment had come. With Arthur standing by the door as guard, Swaminath, with his electric torch flashing in one hand, and the bunch of keys in the other, commenced the burgling business. He tried one key after another, and at last, oh, joy! came to one that fitted the lock. In a moment the key was turned, and the lid of the box raised, and there, lying on the top of everything else, was the letter on which Valen had bestowed so much time and pains. Having satisfied himself that it was *the* letter—the one of all others that he wanted—Swaminath did not trouble to look further, but slipped the precious missive in his pocket, relocked the door, and then, after a glance towards Arthur, crept over to the window. It was Arthur who pushed the window open without a sound, and as noiselessly closed it after they had jumped outside; and then the two hurried along to the School chapel.

The moon was shining brightly, and this added to the exhilaration Swaminath felt, and as they passed into the shadow of a margosa-tree, he could not help giving a chuckle of joy.

They found Mr Chellan at the chapel —he was asleep in the vestry; and when they had awakened him and told him the good news, he rejoiced with them.

Swaminath then found that Mr Chellan had brought a sheet of foolscap with him, at the top of which were a few typewritten lines; and beneath these lines he proceeded to paste the letter which Swaminath had secured, doing so in such a way that the whole of the letter could be read.

That done, amidst much subdued merriment, Mr Chellan handed the document to Swaminath; and then having seen the latter safely housed, he and Arthur went their way.

The next morning the sun rose in great splendour, and with its radiant anthem bade everyone awake; and soon all the High School boys, with the exception of Valen, who, after his toils of the previous night, required a longer rest, had risen and left their rooms. And equally soon they were swarming round the notice-board; and with the little boys clapping their hands, and the bigger ones reading out at the top of their voices, from a letter they saw there, this and that phrase that seemed particularly to appeal to them, there was a general hubbub.

On the notice-board was a sheet of foolscap, with some typewritten lines at the head of it, and beneath these a letter. The typewritten lines read as follows:—

Masters and Boys,

Please see the letter below and who signed it, before tearing this notice up.

We admit that we ought not to have made this letter public, seeing that it is a private one, but we have done so for the sake of the welfare of the School.

The letter is written by that *boaster*, who tells us others that one must not even look at a girl; see now what he himself says and does!

And among those parts of the letter which the bigger boys read out, were such things as the following:—

> 'My dearest sweet' (the opening, and frequently repeated);
>
> 'I am in constant communion with you, and though not by your side, I experience the same thing as you have done';

'I am ready to sacrifice my life for you';

'I am happy only when you are happy, joyful only when you are joyful';

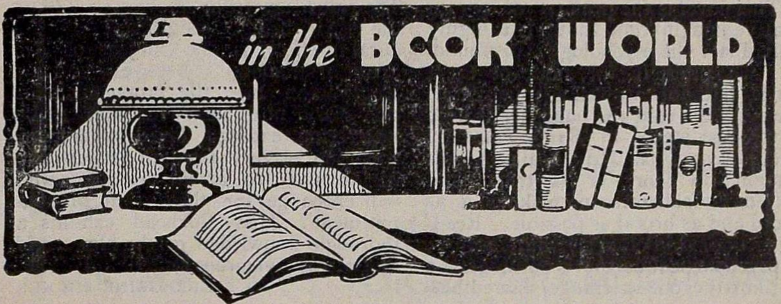
'My sorrow is yours, and yours mine'.

These and other tit-bits were still being read out by the elder boys, and repeated in chorus by the younger ones, when Valen, who had now risen, appeared on the scene. But he was seen coming, and the alarm given, there was a general stampede, so that by the time he reached the notice-board, meaning to learn what the noise was about, he had it to himself.

And then, a few moments later, those of the others who had been able to obtain vantage-points, saw the sheet of foolscap and the letter attached to it, torn into a thousand tiny fragments, and weeping like a child over these fragments, Valen, the boaster!

There is sweet music here that softer falls
Than petals from blown roses on the grass,
Or night-dews on still waters between walls
Of shadowy granite, in a gleaming pass;
Music that gentlier on the spirit lies,
Than tir'd eyelids upon tir'd eyes;
Music that brings sweet sleep down from the blissful skies,
Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.

TENNYSON
(*The Lotos-Eaters*)



INDO-ENGLISH

The Cobbler, and Other Stories, by M. Fattulla Khan (The New Hyderabad Press, Station Road. Secunderabad, Dn).

A SHORT story, more than any other art form, demands excellence in the technique, because it is Short. All the eight stories brought together in this volume are empty of this necessity; they have matter but not form. There is a dewy glow of pathos about all of them; the author, by his great restraint has saved the reader from being thrown into the blue funks. "The Flute" is the most musical in the collection, and "The Purple Book" the most moving. Mr Fathulla Khan is sure to go ahead if he tries to achieve the harmony between content, which he already has, with form.'

M. S. K.

ENGLISH

Silver Collar Boy, by Constance Wright (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

Sailor Town, by Paul Hervey Fox (Gollancz, 7s. 6d.)

The Street of Shadows, by Elizabeth Coxhead (Cassell, 7s. 6d.)

BELIZZA, a beautiful young widow receives as a gift a little Negro boy with a silver collar about his neck. Pompey's devotion to her is so silent, so single-minded that it makes her think she has come upon a new and almost unique thing in human affection. Belizza falls in love with an artist but when the lover demands the negro page of her, she cools and subordinates her passion to the possession of her page. The artist paints her with the little blackamoor at her knee; and when a jilted poet lampoons her he makes the Negro slave a witness to the scandal. Pompey is to be sent back to his native country but the plan is interrupted by a thunder storm in which he meets his end. His death, however, is only a supposition for the man who is to have seen to the carrying out of the plan swears that the Negro was sent to his country. Poor Belizza hears herself called by his spirit, living or dead; she retires into seclusion and obscurity and marries an old lover just for the sake of being taken to the land of her Negro's birth. And because of her utter love for Pompey, it comes to pass that his ghost appears to her descendants in succeeding centuries as an omen of death in the family.

Silver Collar Boy is not in any way a startling novel; its frame is not made of thunder and lightning. But 'it has a most subtle originality, both as a poignant narrative and as an unerring picture of a departed world.' Miss Constance Wright has achieved a perfect triumph in craftsmanship and her style is throughout lively—a pattern of words distinguished alike for their economy and beauty.

'This novel is the product of a rare creative imagination, the style is highly individual: the psychology is profound: yet we praise it for none of these things, but for its strange incredible beauty.' So runs the publisher's note on the dust jacket of *Sailor Town* by Paul Hervey Fox. How a sailor spends a night on shore is its theme and Mr Fox is deliberate in making it as sordid and as brutal as possible. Reading it one's skin crackles with disgust; its psychological bottom is nothing but a vast horrific ooze; strange, incredible! The transition from movie to talkie, the visual being strengthened by the aural in effect, is the subject of *The Street of Shadows*. A Jewess and an Englishman are the protagonists in the story and their fortunes make interesting reading. The drudgery and appalling slavery through which one has to pass to attain stardom—who will exchange for these a life of contentment? Miss Coxhead exhibits a thorough knowledge of the film world and writes a vigorous style.

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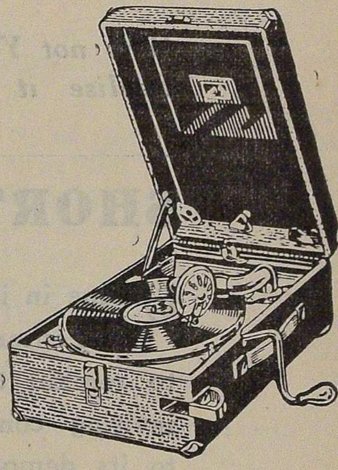

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